



PRESS RELEASE

House National Security Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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STATEMENT OF HONORABLE FLOYD D. SPENCE (R-SC)

OPEN HEARING ON THREATS TO U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS

Thursday, February 13, 1997

Today the committee will consider the kind of issues which ought to frame all our deliberations on the defense budget: what are the threats and challenges facing the United States and our national security interests? We have with us this morning three former Directors of Central Intelligence:

- The Honorable James Schlesinger,
- Judge William Webster, and
- The Honorable James Woolsey

to help us wrestle with this complex question.

In his "State of the Union" speech last week, President Clinton repeatedly referred to the end of the Cold War and declared that "we face no imminent threat." While it is true that the Soviet empire has collapsed, I cannot be as sanguine as the President about the threat. As long as Russia retains a nuclear arsenal capable of destroying the United States in a matter of minutes – and rogue states seek to develop such a capability – our nation continues to face a significant threat.

Nor is the rest of the world calm, quiet or necessarily supportive of U.S. interests. America has abiding national security interests in Europe, in the Middle East, and in East Asia. Our reaction to the war in Bosnia indicates just how far some decision-makers believe this nation must go to extend the peace and stability won in the Cold War to the rest of Europe.

Nor can the Middle East be characterized as peaceful, as it is a region where violence is a daily event. The Arab-Israeli peace is still “process” and not reality. In the Gulf, Iran and Iraq vie for power and seek to challenge the U.S. role as the guarantor of stability and security. These rogue nations not only pose regional threats with their military forces, they also pose a global threat through their sponsorship of terrorism and desperate desire to develop or acquire weapons of mass destruction.

In East Asia, we face the question that may shape future American security more than any other: will an emerging China be a force for peace, or a source of confrontation? The President says we must continue to engage China, and so we should. But engagement is a process, not a purpose. And our first purpose, above trade, above human rights, must be to protect our vital interests. Nor can we forget the degenerating regime in North Korea, armed to the teeth but unable to feed its own people.

In sum, it’s still a dangerous world. Having secured peace at great cost – through three world wars, two hot and one cold, during this century alone – we must remain resolved to protecting it.

Our witnesses today are in a unique position to help us assess the dangers and challenges that so many have worked and sacrificed for:

- James Schlesinger, who served not only as Director of Central Intelligence but also as Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Energy during the Nixon and Carter administrations;
- Judge William Webster, who served as Director of Central Intelligence in both the Reagan and Bush administrations; and
- James Woolsey, who served as President Clinton’s first CIA director.

Gentleman, I welcome you to the committee and look forward to your testimony.